



PHOTOS BY NANCY MONTGOMERY/Stars and Stripes

**Capt. Mark Peters, Stongman winner at the USAG Darmstadt competition Saturday, holds the punishing Crucifix pose for 54 seconds.**

# Darmstadt festival celebrates the strong — the really strong

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY

*Stars and Stripes*

**DARMSTADT, Germany** — They were all undeniably strong men. Their muscles were many and bulging, and they all looked cool wearing that wide leather belt that helps prevent hernias. But who was The Strongman?

On Saturday at the Cambrai-Fritsch Kaserne's Strong Man competition, it wasn't all that serious a question.

"How about you, sir?" Brian Morgan, fitness coordinator at U.S. Army Garrison Darmstadt, said to a trim man, smartly attired in a black leather jacket, who had come to watch the competition. "Take that jacket off and I'll get you some sweats."

The man declined. Wisely, some might say. Because who really wants to carry 200 pounds of concrete for several hundred feet? Who wants to lift an empty — but still very heavy — beer keg over his head repeatedly for 90 seconds, or hold dumbbells out from his sides until he wants to throw up, or flip a 300-plus pound tire over and over until he just can't flip it anymore?

Army Capt. Jake Jacobson, that's who.

Jacobson, 31, company commander for the Warrior Preparation Center in Kaiserslautern, and, at 185 pounds, the sole competitor in the lightweight division, had come to Darmstadt with his wife and baby to watch friends competing in Sunday's bodybuilding event.

But when he was begged — er, asked — to participate, he said sure, and headed over to the PX to buy some shorts. "I'm a team player," he said.



**Christina Jacobson roots for her husband, Capt. Jake Jacobson, with an assist from James, 10 months.**

Not only that, he was already a winner. But still, he was taking a chance. In a strongman competition, Morgan said, "You can embarrass yourself."

Rounding out the competition were two heavyweight contenders. Air Force Capt. Mark Peters of the 24th Intelligence Squadron at Ramstein Air Base was by far the most experienced. He'd competed in strongman competitions in the U.S., he said, as well as Germany and Switzerland. At 31, and weighing 234 pounds, Peters said he preferred these sorts of competitions to straight powerlifting.

"Here, there are different weights, different implements," Peters said. "I like the variety."

Sgt. Jay Robinson of USAG Hohenfels was the third competitor and at 28 the youngest. Robinson, too, had entered on sort of a whim, but according to his cheering section he was a 228-pound "workoutaholic" who logged at least two hours a day, every day, in the gym and on the running track.

As the contest began, the tension was bearable. With two novices among only three competitors — no one was quite sure why there weren't more — the event took on a homey, comfortable feel. Some 25 spectators — and

the event coordinators — cheered for all three.

"Get it, baby!" Morgan said repeatedly to spur the men on in their Herculean labors. "Get your mind right!"

"A walk in the park!" someone commented as the men carried 200 pounds as they walked — and sometimes jogged — for 100 feet as many times as they could in 90 seconds. That's called the Farmer's Walk.

Then it was time for their second try. "Why do I have to do it again?" Jacobson said. "I don't have to do everything twice, do I?"

Actually, though, he did. Also the Crucifix — holding dumbbells by their ends out to the side until the pain became unbearable — the eponymous Tire Flip, and Keg Press and a weird event with a wheelbarrow. All painful. All twice. All done without embarrassment by all three.

In the end, they all won. Peters, Robinson and Jacobson all were awarded plaques, although if you were counting, the winner was Peters in the heavyweight class, with Robinson coming in second in that class, and Jacobson, who had bested Robinson in some categories, first in the lightweight class.

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## Corrections

■ An Oct. 16 headline should have said the new Air Force Memorial was dedicated near the Pentagon. It is on a promontory next to Arlington National Cemetery.

■ An Oct. 16 story should have said Fort Hood, Texas, has an average annual rainfall of about 31 inches.